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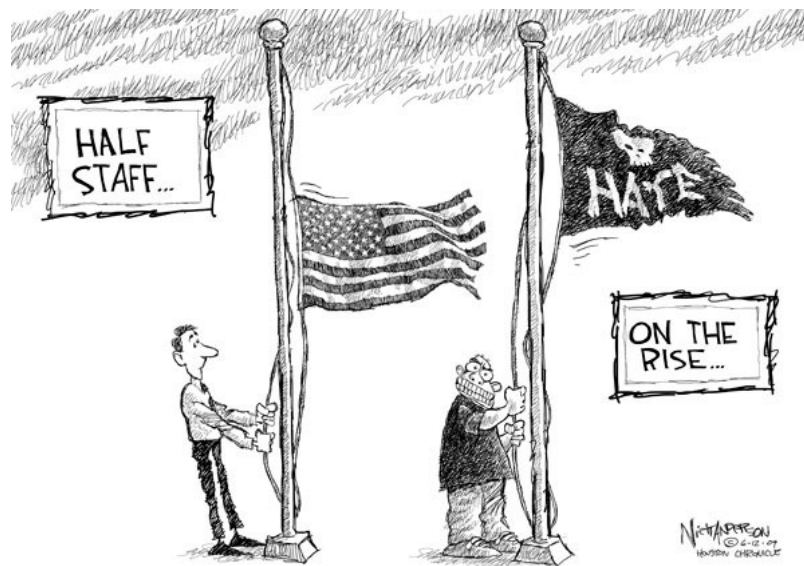
Issue Brief: Latinos and Violence in the United States

Keywords: Latinos, violence, hate crimes, anti-Latino, anti-immigrant

Description: The following issue brief examines Latino violence in terms of hate crimes perpetrated against members of this ethnic group. It compares data between ethnoracial groups and attempts to describe the cause of the increase in anti-Latino hate crimes.

Key points:

- The reported number of hate crimes against Latinos rose by forty percent from 2003 to 2007, but slightly decreased in 2008.
- Statistical data does not draw a distinction within the “Hispanic” category between American citizens and undocumented immigrants.
- A strong correlation between anti-immigrant propaganda and anti-Latino hate crimes indicate that a growing nativist movement may be either causing or directly or indirectly affecting violence against Latinos.
- President Obama recently signed a bill into law that expands the powers of the Justice Department to investigate and prosecute hate crimes.



(<http://www.americanprogress.org/cartoons/2009/07/072009.html>)

Issue Brief:

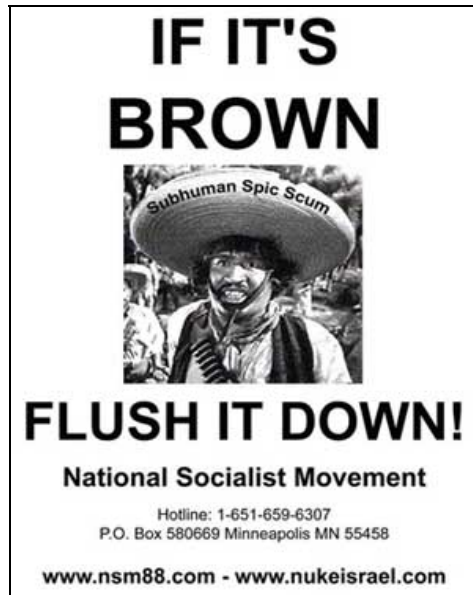
In exploring the intersection of Latinos and violence, one should note that this topic encompasses a broad range of issues: domestic violence, sexual violence, gang violence, police brutality, hate crimes, and possibly other less obvious forms of violent expressions. Latinos can be either victims or perpetrators or both. However, I would like to focus on Latinos as victims of hate crimes, since perpetrators of this form of violence often act based specifically on the individual's "Latino" identity. Hate crimes are identified as forms of violence motivated by biases based on race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity/national origin, and disability.

According to the FBI's 2008 *Hate Crimes Statistics*, the highest percentages of hate crimes for all groups were those motivated by racial or ethnic bias. In general, most hate crimes are comprised of intimidation, simple assault, and aggravated assault. Reportedly, a total of 1,226 individuals were victims of hate crimes motivated by the offender's bias toward a particular ethnicity/national origin. Of these, 64.6 percent were victims of an anti-Hispanic bias. Victims of racial bias crimes totaled 4,934 individuals, 72.9 percent of which were victims of an offender's anti-black bias. The next highest percentage represents victims of anti-white bias, falling at 16.8 percent. Thus, Latinos and Blacks suffer significantly higher rates of hate crimes than any other ethnoracial group. The 2008 report reveals that, in instances where the offender's race was known, about 50 percent of perpetrators of anti-Latino hate crimes were White while roughly 22 percent were Black.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

(<http://www.splcenter.org/blog/2008/10/29/anti-latino-hate-crimes-rise-for-fourth-year/>)

The FBI reports, however, may be misrepresenting the actual number of incidences in anti-Latino hate crimes. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics accounted for 20 to 30 times more incidents of hate crimes in the United States than did the FBI. Nevertheless, the rise in anti-Latino hate crimes is accurate. As anti-immigrant propaganda has increased substantially, so has hate violence against perceived "illegal aliens." This strong correlation indicates that a growing nativist movement and the controversy surrounding immigration reform may be the cause, direct or indirect, of anti-Latino violence. Hate groups have grown dramatically in California, Arizona and Texas, all of which are Southern border states at the forefront of the immigration issue.



(<http://vivirlatino.com/2008/03/11/hate-crimes-against-latinos-up-2.php>)

There appears to be no distinction within the FBI statistics between documented and undocumented Latinos. Thus, anti-Latino hate crimes may plague both communities equally if such acts of violence are based on perceptions of immigration status or are motivated by bias against the Latino community at large. In 2008, a group of white teenagers fatally beat Luis Ramirez, an undocumented Mexican immigrant, in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. That same year, Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant, was also beaten by a group of teenagers in Long Island, New York. In 2010, a string of assaults on Mexicans in Staten Island were considered to be bias-motivated crimes carried out by blacks. In Arizona, a man shot and killed a third-generation Mexican-American man this past June after shouting, "Hurry up and go back to Mexico or you're gonna die." Incidents such as these reinforce the idea that anti-immigrant bias may be manifesting itself in anti-Latino violence.

A lack of comprehensive data concerning anti-Latino violence affects the degree to which one can make adequate assessments. The data fails to consider the country of origin of Latino victims and perpetrators. Therefore, it is unclear which Latino communities (Mexican, Puerto-Rican, Cuban, etc) are suffering the most from this type of violence. Moreover, the data also lacks an adequate recognition of intra-Latino violence. In other words, it could be that a Cuban may attack a Mexican or a Mexican may attack a Puerto Rican solely because of a difference in national origin. Though anti-national origin crimes are reported, this categorization is not specific to the Latino community as it could encompass a variety of different ethnoracial groups. The failure to distinguish between documented and undocumented poses the same problem, as Latino Americans may act violently against Latino undocumented immigrants. Evidently, these factors also need to be reported and assessed in order to better analyze the situation.

Though there has been national media attention of anti-Latino hate crimes, there have not been many actions taken to prevent their occurrence. On a local level, some neighborhoods have increased their police force to protect vulnerable residents. President Obama recently signed a bill into law that expands the powers of the Justice Department to investigate and prosecute hate crimes. Still, it remains to be seen whether this bill will address this issue.

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Relevant Websites:

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Southern Poverty Law Center: <http://www.splcenter.org/>

New America Media: <http://newamericamedia.org/>